

# Secretary Roche discusses Air Force vision

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**VERSAILLES, France (AFFN)** – Secretary of the Air Force James G. Roche discussed his vision of the future for the Air Force during a June 21 visit here.

Secretary Roche, who is the 20th person to hold the service's highest civilian leadership position, addressed several issues during his stop at the Lafayette Escadrille Memorial here. The memorial is dedicated to American aviators who fought for France before the United States' entry into World War I.

A proponent of positive change, Secretary Roche plans on tackling several issues affecting today's Air Force, including retention.

"The issue, first and foremost, is to find out why we have members of our Air Force leaving, especially at mid-career. From a business standpoint, it is so much more efficient to retain good people than to try and replace them," he said.

"In the Air Force, we really want to recruit for careers. We'll always have Americans joining the Air Force with the intention of leaving after a few years. If, however, there are obstacles for people who plan on making the Air Force a career, the first thing to do is to find out what (the obstacles) are and to address them."

Treating airmen in the same manner that successful companies treat their employees is one way of improving retention, Secretary Roche said.

"Successful organizations know that people are a valuable resource that are very hard to replace," he said. "You can't train a master sergeant or a pilot in any other way except as a master sergeant or a pilot. You can't go out on the market and hire one. You have to train one."

"Each airman, officer or enlisted, is the key to our future. That's the kind of attitude that will change the climate," he added.

Secretary Roche believes there is a need to be more efficient in the way we do business, "but it's not because we did anything wrong," he said. Any large organization, over time, will engender some inefficiency. That's why it

should have a process of continually trying to improve and change, to look to do things smarter.

"Change isn't something to be feared. We don't necessarily have to run out and embrace change, but we certainly have to recognize that change is healthy – a continuous basis of trying to get better," he said.

Although Secretary Roche said the Air Force has done a lot in terms of using its resources efficiently, he just wants to look across the board because "it's a broad issue with no simple answers."

"Any organization can get into habits and unless it works to become more efficient, it will consume more and more of its resources inefficiently," he said.

"Quite often, it's an accumulation of lots of little things," he explained. There may be layers of management we just don't need. There may be reports we're generating

that no one really makes use of anymore. While they may have been worthwhile at one time, they never went away.

"We just want to make sure that the demands on our people are demands that are legitimate," he added.

All three services are currently working together to find ways of making the U.S. military more efficient, according to Secretary Roche, and funds generated from this cost-saving approach could be used in other areas where they may be needed.

Secretary Roche, who spent 23 years in the Navy and retired as a captain in 1983, believes ties between the military and private industry will play a major role in the Air Force's quest toward efficiency.

"The Air Force has always been associated with corporations who are at the leading edge of technology," he said. "From the early days of commercial aviation, the Army Air Corps came along and asked, 'Look, can we make the engines a little bit more powerful, so we can go a little bit further or a little bit faster?' Whether it's information technology, materials, avionics or anything else, that won't change."

Today, the Air Force's drive for better, faster weapons systems has taken shape in the form of the F-22 Raptor and Joint Strike Fighter. Secretary Roche expects these aircraft to help shape the future of Air Force aviation and weaponry.

"People who are intimately familiar with airplanes tend to think of the F-22 and the Joint Strike Fighter as substitutes for each other. They're not," he said.

"The F-22, because of its stealth, super cruise and dramatic avionics, truly changes the character of air war," said Secretary Roche. "For the first time in history, we can have airplanes over an opponent's territory virtually undetected. If an opponent (retaliates) with another airplane, the F-22 can deal with it quickly and then return to its stealthy state."

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**James Roche**  
*Secretary of the Air Force*



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